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DEPARTMENT PASS TO AID/OTI (RPORTER)

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM VE

SUBJECT: GOVERNOR ROSALES: SEEKING INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT

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Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ROBERT DOWNES,
REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

¶1. (C) Summary. Zulia Governor and de facto opposition leader Manuel Rosales briefed the Ambassador June 1 on Rosales' ongoing efforts to persuade other Latin American governments that the "democratic deficit" in Venezuela is a regional problem. Rosales considers his May 21-22 visit to Panama a success and is planning to visit Uruguay June 13-15 in an effort to discourage the GOU from supporting Venezuela's final entry into Mercosur. The Ambassador briefed Rosales on USG assistance efforts in Zulia, including his late June visit to Maracaibo to roll out a \$2.2 million counternarcotics cooperation program in Maracaibo. He also refuted opposition rumors regarding the recent visit of Congressman Delahunt. Rosales expects student demonstrations against the government closure of RCTV to continue, but did not elaborate. The Zulia Governor pledged to energize state chambers and associations in support of an American Presence Post in Maracaibo. End Summary.

Lobbying Latin America

¶2. (C) At his request, Zulia Governor and de facto opposition leader Manuel Rosales called on the Ambassador June 1 at his residence. Rosales said he will continue to work to educate other Latin American governments on the "democratic deficit" in Venezuela under President Chavez. He reported that he had good May 21-22 meetings with OAS officials in Panama, as well as excellent media opportunities. He is urging that the OAS General Assembly debate or approve a resolution on Venezuela at the June 3-5 OAS General Assembly. Rosales said GOP and OAS reps were optimistic that Venezuela would be discussed. He thought someone other than the United States should take the lead, such as Canada.

¶3. (C) Rosales provided the Ambassador with the copy of his eight-page letter to OAS Secretary General Insulza. The letter on Un Nuevo Tiempo (UNT) party stationery contains a detailed description of the "democratic deficit" in Venezuela and criticism of the BRV's lack of protection of human rights. Arguing that there exists a "change that affects the constitutional order" of democracy in Venezuela and citing the OAS Inter-American Democratic Charter, Rosales calls on Insulza and the OAS Permanent Council to send officials to conduct a fact-finding mission in Venezuela.

¶4. (C) Rosales next plans to travel to Montevideo, June 13-15, where he intends to talk to the press and GOU officials about Venezuela and Mercosur. He hopes to discourage the GOU from supporting Venezuela's final entry into Mercosur. Rosales postponed a previously planned visit to Uruguay after he and his team were unable to confirm meetings with key interlocutors. They believe BRV officials had persuaded officials not to meet with Rosales several weeks ago.

U.S. Cooperation with Zulia

¶5. (C) The Zulia governor reiterated his strong interest in launching visible joint projects and programs with the USG. The Ambassador noted the USG also wants to move ahead with a U.S. contribution of \$2.2 million to promote joint cooperation. The Ambassador had postponed his visit planned May 30-31 visit to Maracaibo due to RCTV protests, but pledged to reschedule the trip later in June. Rosales said he hoped USG support would go beyond training police and enhancing security. The Ambassador assured Rosales that our assistance efforts encompass education, health, and security.

Student Demonstrations

¶6. (C) Rosales held a May 31 Caracas press conference in which he lambasted the BRV's decision to close independent broadcaster RCTV on May 28. During the media encounter, Rosales challenged President Chavez to hold a nation-wide consultative referendum on whether RCTV should be allowed back on the free airwaves and seek the counsel of international bodies, such as the UN, OAS, and Mercosur partners. Rosales told the Ambassador that he expected student protests against RCTV's closure to continue, but did

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not offer details as to why he thought that.

Codel Delahunt Rumors

¶7. (C) Rosales said there is a rumor in opposition circles that Congressman Delahunt and the Ambassador met with Chavez to trade an increase in Venezuelan oil sales to the United States in exchange for official silence on the RCTV matter. The Ambassador corrected the record, noting that he did not participate in the Congressman's May 30 meeting with Chavez. Moreover, to the best of the Ambassador's knowledge, Chavez and Delahunt did not discuss oil sales to the United States. Rosales, while reassured, said it would be better for rumor control if we got word out to the press on the visit. The Ambassador agreed, but noted that the visit was organized completely between the Congressman and the BRV, so our ability to influence was limited. Rosales expressed a willingness to meet or designate a senior UNT party official to meet with any visiting U.S. congresspersons.

Consulate Maracaibo

¶8. (C) Reflecting on the BRV's decision not to respond to the USG request to open an American Presence Post (APP) in Maracaibo over the last 14 months, Rosales asked if he should generate public pressure in Zulia. The Ambassador responded that that would be useful if Rosales could do it in non-political way. He urged him to play on Zulianos' desire to obtain consular, commercial, cultural, and educational services in Maracaibo, instead of having to travel to Caracas. Rosales said he may try to energize interested chambers and associations. Rosales speculated that Chavez

himself is probably blocking the opening of the APP.

¶ 9. (SBU) Rosales was accompanied by UNT International Affairs Advisor Timoteo Zambrano, Zulia Sports Director Oslando Munoz, Advisor Armando Leon, and Advisor Ruben Barboza. The DCM and Poloff joined the Ambassador.

Comment

¶ 10. (C) Zulia Governor Rosales, to his credit, remains ready to associate himself and his state government publicly with U.S. assistance programs, despite the political risks. He also continues to seek U.S. diplomatic support, wherever possible, for his international efforts to raise concerns about Chavez' increasingly authoritarian rule. Rosales told the Ambassador in January that he planned to mobilize local opinion on lobbying the BRV to allow the USG to open a "consulate" in Maracaibo, but has not yet done so. The Zulia governor's brief visit to Caracas gave him an opportunity to express support for students demonstrating against RCTV's closure before the national and international media. Contrary to BRV assertions of an opposition conspiracy, Rosales, like other opposition politicians, appears to be pleasantly surprised and did not suggest he has played a role in coordinating student demonstrators. A National Resistance Command leader harshly criticized Rosales' RCTV referendum idea, and student leaders continue to keep opposition parties at arms length from their events.

BROWNFIELD